

38/2007/526LB

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

**REFURBISHMENT, ALTERATIONS, REPAIR AND EXTENSIONS TO THE COUNTY MUSEUM, TAUNTON CASTLE, CASTLE GREEN, TAUNTON**

322588/124629

LISTED BUILDING CONSENT-WORKS

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**PROPOSAL**

The proposal involves a number of works internally and externally. The external work is to erect single storey extensions to provide a welcome building (with new access to Jubilee Gardens), improved circulation space through east and west passages, together with new toilets and café seating area, improving facilities for the museum. In addition, a plant screen for the roof is provided as is the relocation of the almshouse and alterations to relocate gate piers. The internal works largely relate to the provision of a new gallery inserted into the Great Hall to improve exhibition space, as well as a new stair and lift and alterations and changes to reflect the extensions proposed.

The application is one made by the County Council and has to be reported to the Secretary of State prior to determination. A separate planning application is required for the external works and is to be determined by the County Council while an application for Ancient Monument consent is also required. A wider scheme for major improvements to the setting of the Castle is likely to be submitted in due course.

**CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS**

CONSERVATION OFFICER - I fully concur with the views of English Heritage. The County Council have been advised that bat mitigation measures need to be addressed by amended plans or a fresh listed building application if applicable. As advised, certain concerns noted by English Heritage should be capable of control via conditions. I therefore support the proposals subject to the views of the Secretary of State and suggested conditions.

ENGLISH HERITAGE - Generally we are in support of the refurbishment of the museum if it secures necessary conservation works to the historic buildings and an improved design for the gallery within the Great Hall. The impact of the alterations on the historic fabric of the Castle is not harmful and the new additions are sympathetic in form whilst clearly contemporary in design. The redesign of the gallery within the Great Hall represents part of a continual process of evolution of its interior and will allow its historic form to still be legible, albeit in a more contemporary context than is currently the case. However, the issue we have already raised regarding the displacement of two architectural exhibits within it; - the late medieval fireplace and the grand eighteenth century staircase; and the need to find a meaningful home for them - does not seem to have been progressed since our pre-application discussions. Whilst not originating in the Castle, these features do have

historic significance and are part of the cultural assets of the building, which were presumably donated to it on the understanding that they would both be preserved and displayed to the public. It is somewhat risky, we feel, for consent for their removal to be granted with no, or little, idea of their ultimate fate. If the museum is unable at this stage to offer definitive locations for these features then conditions need to be built into any consent ensuring that the solution is built into the development process and the features do not simply disappear into storage. Equally, a condition may be needed to approve at least a method statement for the relocation of the timber-framed almshouse. Whilst the supporting statement asserts that its relocation “provides the opportunity to address its fragmentary character and loss of context”, it does not explain exactly how it does so. Will there for example be additional interpretation of the history of the almshouse? Since the almshouse is a somewhat unusual feature within the castle courtyard, improved interpretation is certainly desirable. One alteration of a retrograde nature is the location of obtrusive plant equipment on the flat roof of the Wyndham Gallery building. Whilst this may be one of the least historically sensitive of the buildings on the site, locating the plant on top of it gives an unfortunate prominence which detracts somewhat from the adjoining historic buildings. Some form of mitigation of the visual impact would be highly desirable. We understand mitigation of possible impact of bat roosts may be a requirement of English Nature and this could impose additional impacts on the listed buildings. Until we know what these are, we are unable to comment in more detail but we assume that we will be consulted further should any such works prove necessary which affect the fabric of the listed buildings.

The supporting information refers to conservation benefits that this scheme will bring to the listed buildings and improved interpretation of them without detailing any such works. Since that is part of the justification for the overall project it would be helpful if those works were described in more detail and we would suggest a detailed schedule of works to the listed buildings is required for approval as a condition of any consent should it be granted. The archaeological impact of the proposal on the scheduled ancient monument is being addressed by our Inspector of Ancient Monuments, who is writing separately on the issue to Somerset County Council. In relation to the listed building, we are aware that the full extent of the works may involve uncovering/disturbing historic fabric, which is not currently visible and may need to be recorded. We suggest a programme of archaeological supervision/recording, similar to that which will be required in relation to buried archaeology, should be required in respect of the historic buildings, according to a programme of works approved by the County Archaeologist.

## **POLICY CONTEXT**

PPS1 (Delivering Sustainable Development) and PPG15 (Planning and the Historic Environment).

Somerset & Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policies STR1 (Sustainable Development), STR4 (Development in Towns), POLICY 8 (Outstanding Heritage Settlements), POLICY 9 (The Built Historic Environment), POLICY12 (Nationally Important Archaeological Remains).

Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1, (General Requirements), S2 (Design), EN14 (Conservation Areas), EN21 (Nationally Important Archaeological Remains).

## **ASSESSMENT**

The proposed scheme involves a numbers of changes to the existing fabric of the building to improve the facilities and internal layout to the benefit of the future of the museums service. The main works involve the demolition of two flat roof projections on the main front elevation within the Inner Ward and replacement with a modern flat roof links together with a new link building serving as a welcome building. This new area will allow better circulation space together with a new café seating area and toilets as well as an improved entranceway into the museum. The design of the new extensions are considered to be in appropriate materials and to be of an appropriate modern design not to detract from the character and setting of the listed museum buildings. English Heritage supports this view. The moving of the existing almshouse within the Inner Ward and gate pier alterations are not considered to adversely affect the character of the conservation area or the listed building and these works are also considered acceptable.

Internally the main change relates to the Great Hall with removal of the existing gallery and staircase as well as a fireplace exhibit. A new gallery, staircase and lift are proposed and the changes are considered to respect the character of the building and to be acceptable. Conditions are considered necessary to ensure that the fireplace and staircase exhibits are retained for display and the provision of a method statement concerning the almshouse relocation. A condition requiring a detail schedule of works is also considered appropriate.

The works involve internal alterations and removal of a number of trees from the Jubilee Gardens. These works have been considered under the planning application and the Landscape Officer has raised no objection. This has also been considered from an ecological perspective and specifically with regard to any bat impact. It is not considered bat mitigation that would affect the character of the listed building is likely to be required. If this were to be the case a separate listed building application for any mitigation would be necessary.

English Heritage has raised concern over the relocation of the plant to the roof of the Wyndham Gallery building because of its potential prominence. Existing plant is sited on the flat roof of the link building adjacent to the Wyndham Gallery and is considered prominent from the Inner Ward of the Castle as well as from the gardens to the north as it is unscreened. An alternative to the screening proposed is the raising of a parapet wall around the building. However, this would need to be over 1m high to screen long distance views and the impact of this on the building is not considered appropriate. While this building has been altered in the past, the raising of a parapet wall would over-emphasize the existing blank upper storey. The screening of air conditioning plant on the roof of the building as proposed with a 1.5m zinc panelled screen is considered appropriate. The view from the Inner Ward is limited and the long distance views of the centrally sited and screened plant from the north is considered acceptable in terms of the impact on the character of the listed building.

A further application in terms of the landscape setting of the Castle is expected in the near future.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Subject to the views of the Secretary of State consent is recommended subject to conditions of time limit, materials, sample panel of stonework, detail of zinc cladding, details of relocation/re-use of the almshouse, stone gate piers, staircase and fireplace, method statement for almshouse relocation, schedule of repairs, details of roof glazing, windows/doors, architraves, staircases, café screen, lifts, ventilation, fixing of gallery and fire screen and programme of archaeological supervision.

## **REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

The development is considered to preserve the character and fabric of the listed building and to comply with advice in PPG15 and Taunton Deane Local Plan policies S1, S2 and EN21 and material considerations do not indicate otherwise.

**In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.**

**CONTACT OFFICER: 356398 MR G CLIFFORD**

NOTES: